THE EVERLASTING MERCY

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Cover

THE EVERLASTING MERCY

BY

JOHN MASEFIELD

AUTHOR OF
"THE TRAGEDY OF POMPEY THE GREAT"
"THE TRAGEDY OF NAN," ETC.

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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TO

MY WIFE

Thy place is biggyd above the sterrys deer,
Noon erthely paleys wrouhte in so statly wyse,
Com on my freend, my brothir moost enteer,
For the I offryd my blood in sacrifise.

JOHN LYDGATE.

THE EVERLASTING MERCY

From '41 to '51
I was my folk's contrary son;
I bit my father's hand right through
And broke my mother's heart in two.
I sometimes go without my dinner
Now that I know the times I've gi'n her.

From '51 to '6l
I cut my teeth and took to fun.
I learned what not to be afraid of

And what stuff women's lips are made of;
I learned with what a rosy feeling
Good ale makes floors seem like the ceiling,
And how the moon gives shiny light
To lads as roll home singing by't.
My blood did leap, my flesh did revel,
Saul Kane was tokened to the devil.

From '61 to '67
I lived in disbelief of heaven.
I drunk, I fought, I poached, I whored,
I did despite unto the Lord,
I cursed, 'twould make a man look pale,
And nineteen times I went to jail.
Now, friends, observe and look upon me,
Mark how the Lord took pity on me.

By Dead Man's Thorn, while setting wires,
Who should come up but Billy Myers,
A friend of mine, who used to be
As black a sprig of hell as me,
With whom I'd planned, to save encroachin',
Which fields and coverts each should poach in.
Now when he saw me set my snare,
He tells me 'Get to hell from there.
This field is mine,' he says, 'by right;
If you poach here, there'll be a fight.
Out now,' he says, 'and leave your wire;
It's mine.'
'It ain't.'
'You put.'
'You liar.'

'You closhy put.'
'You bloody liar.'
'This is my field.'
'This is my wire.'
'I'm ruler here.'
'You ain't.'
'I am.'

'I'll fight you for it.'
'Right, by damn.
Not now, though, I've a-sprained my thumb,
We'll fight after the harvest hum.
And Silas Jones, that bookie wide,
Will make a purse five pounds a side.'
Those were the words, that was the place
By which God brought me into grace.

On Wood Top Field the peewits go
Mewing and wheeling ever so;
And like the shaking of a timbrel
Cackles the laughter of the whimbrel.
In the old quarry-pit they say
Head-keeper Pike was made away.

He walks, head-keeper Pike, for harm,
He taps the windows of the farm;
The blood drips from his broken chin,
He taps and begs to be let in.
On Wood Top, nights, I've shaked to hark
The peewits wambling in the dark
Lest in the dark the old man might
Creep up to me to beg a light.

But Wood Top grass is short and sweet
And springy to a boxer's feet;
At harvest hum the moon so bright
Did shine on Wood Top for the fight.

When Bill was stripped down to his bends
I thought how long we two'd been friends,
And in my mind, about that wire,
I thought 'He's right, I am a liar,
As sure as skilly's made in prison
The right to poach that copse is his'n.
I'll have no luck to-night,' thinks I.
I'm fighting to defend a lie.

And this moonshiny evening's fun

Is worse than aught I ever done.'
And thinking that way my heart bled so
I almost stept to Bill and said so.
And now Bill's dead I would be glad
If I could only think I had.
But no. I put the thought away
For fear of what my friends would say.
They'd backed me, see? O Lord, the sin
Done for the things there's money in.

The stakes were drove, the ropes were hitched,
Into the ring my hat I pitched.
My corner faced the Squire's park
Just where the fir-trees make it dark;
The place where I begun poor Nell
Upon the woman's road to hell.
I thought oft, sitting in my corner
After the time-keep struck his warner
(Two brandy flasks, for fear of noise,
Clinked out the time to us two boys).
And while my seconds chafed and gloved me
I thought of Nell's eyes when she loved me,
And wondered how my tot would end,
First Nell cast off and now my friend;
And in the moonlight dim and wan
I knew quite well my luck was gone;
And looking round I felt a spite
At all who'd come to see me fight;
The five and forty human faces
Inflamed by drink and going to races,
Faces of men who'd never been
Merry or true or live or clean;
Who'd never felt the boxer's trim
Of brain divinely knit to limb,
Nor felt the whole live body go
One tingling health from top to toe;
Nor took a punch nor given a swing,
But just soaked deady round the ring
Until their brains and bloods were foul
Enough to make their throttles howl,

While we whom Jesus died to teach
Fought round on round, three minutes each.

And thinking that, you'll understand
I thought, 'I'll go and take Bill's hand.
I'll up and say the fault was mine,
He sha'n't make play for these here swine.'
And then I thought that that was silly,
They'd think I was afraid of Billy:
They'd think (I thought it, God forgive me)
I funked the hiding Bill could give me.
And that thought made me mad and hot.
Think that, will they? Well, they shall not.
They sha'n't think that. I will not. I'm
Damned if I will. I will not.'
Time!

From the beginning of the bout
My luck was gone, my hand was out.
Right from the start Bill called the play,
But I was quick and kept away
Till the fourth round, when work got mixed,
And then I knew Bill had me fixed.
My hand was out, why, Heaven knows;
Bill punched me when and where he chose.
Through two more rounds we quartered wide
And all the time my hands seemed tied;
Bill punched me when and where he pleased.
The cheering from my backers ceased,
But every punch I heard a yell
Of 'That's the style, Bill, give him hell.'
No one for me, but Jimmy's light
'Straight left! Straight left!' and 'Watch his right.'

I don't know how a boxer goes
When all his body hums from blows;
I know I seemed to rock and spin,
I don't know how I saved my chin;
I know I thought my only friend
Was that clinked flask at each round's end

When my two seconds, Ed and Jimmy,
Had sixty seconds help to gimme.
But in the ninth, with pain and knocks
I stopped: I couldn't fight nor box.
Bill missed his swing, the light was tricky,
But I went down, and stayed down, dicky.
'Get up,' cried Jim. I said, 'I will.'
Then all the gang yelled, 'Out him, Bill.
Out him.' Bill rushed ... and Clink, Clink, Clink.
Time! and Jim's knee, and rum to drink.
And round the ring there ran a titter:
'Saved by the call, the bloody quitter.'

They drove (a dodge that never fails)
A pin beneath my finger nails.
They poured what seemed a running beck
Of cold spring water down my neck;
Jim with a lancet quick as flies
Lowered the swellings round my eyes.
They sluiced my legs and fanned my face
Through all that blessed minute's grace;
They gave my calves a thorough kneading,
They salved my cuts and stopped the bleeding.
A gulp of liquor dulled the pain,
And then the two flasks clinked again.
Time!
There was Bill as grim as death.
He rushed, I clinched, to get more breath.
And breath I got, though Billy bats
Some stinging short-arms in my slats.

And when we broke, as I foresaw,
He swung his right in for the jaw.
I stopped it on my shoulder bone,
And at the shock I heard Bill groan--
A little groan or moan or grunt
As though I'd hit his wind a bunt.
At that, I clinched, and while we clinched,
His old-time right-arm dig was flinched,
And when we broke he hit me light

As though he didn't trust his right,
He flapped me somehow with his wrist
As though he couldn't use his fist,
And when he hit he winced with pain.
I thought, 'Your sprained thumb's crocked again.'
So I got strength and Bill gave ground,
And that round was an easy round.

During the wait my Jimmy said,
'What's making Billy fight so dead?
He's all to pieces. Is he blown?'
'His thumb's out.'
'No? Then it's your own.
It's all your own, but don't be rash--
He's got the goods if you've got cash,
And what one hand can do he'll do,
Be careful this next round or two.'

Time! There was Bill, and I felt sick
That luck should play so mean a trick
And give me leave to knock him out
After he'd plainly won the bout.
But by the way the man came at me
He made it plain he meant to bat me;
If you'd a seen the way he come
You wouldn't think he'd crocked a thumb.
With all his skill and all his might
He clipped me dizzy left and right;
The Lord knows what the effort cost,
But he was mad to think he'd lost,
And knowing nothing else could save him
He didn't care what pain it gave him.
He called the music and the dance
For five rounds more and gave no chance.

Try to imagine if you can
The kind of manhood in the man,
And if you'd like to feel his pain,
You sprain your thumb and hit the sprain,
And hit it hard, with all your power

On something hard for half-an-hour,
While someone thumps you black and blue,
And then you'll know what Billy knew.
Bill took that pain without a sound
Till half-way through the eighteenth round,
And then I sent him down and out,
And Silas said, 'Kane wins the bout.'

When Bill came to, you understand,
I ripped the mitten from my hand
And went across to ask Bill shake.
My limbs were all one pain and ache,
I was so weary and so sore
I don't think I'd a stood much more.
Bill in his corner bathed his thumb,
Buttoned his shirt and glowered glum.
'I'll never shake your hand,' he said.
'I'd rather see my children dead.
I've been about and had some fun with you,
But you're a liar and I've done with you.
You've knocked me out, you didn't beat me;
Look out the next time that you meet me,
There'll be no friend to watch the clock for you
And no convenient thumb to crock for you,
And I'll take care, with much delight,
You'll get what you'd a got to-night;
That puts my meaning clear, I guess,
Now get to hell; I want to dress.'

I dressed. My backers one and all
Said, 'Well done you,' or 'Good old Saul.
Saul is a wonder and a fly 'un,
What'll you have, Saul, at the Lion?'
With merry oaths they helped me down
The stony wood-path to the town.

The moonlight shone on Cabbage Walk,
It made the limestone look like chalk,
It was too late for any people,
Twelve struck as we went by the steeple.

A dog barked, and an owl was calling,
The Squire's brook was still a-falling,
The carved heads on the church looked down
On 'Russell, Blacksmith of this Town,'
And all the graves of all the ghosts
Who rise on Christmas Eve in hosts
To dance and carol in festivity
For joy of Jesus Christ's Nativity
(Bell-ringer Dawe and his two sons
Beheld 'em from the bell-tower once),
Two and two about about
Singing the end of Advent out,
Dwindling down to windlestraws
When the glittering peacock craws,
As craw the glittering peacock should
When Christ's own star comes over the wood.
Lamb of the sky come out of fold
Wandering windy heavens cold.
So they shone and sang till twelve
When all the bells ring out of theirselve;
Rang a peal for Christmas morn,
Glory, men, for Christ is born.

All the old monks' singing places
Glimmered quick with flitting faces,
Singing anthems, singing hymns
Under carven cherubims.
Ringer Dawe aloft could mark
Faces at the window dark
Crowding, crowding, row on row,
Till all the church began to glow.
The chapel glowed, the nave, the choir,
All the faces became fire
Below the eastern window high
To see Christ's star come up the sky.
Then they lifted hands and turned,
And all their lifted fingers burned,
Burned like the golden altar tallows,
Burned like a troop of God's own Hallows,
Bringing to mind the burning time

When all the bells will rock and chime
And burning saints on burning horses
Will sweep the planets from their courses
And loose the stars to burn up night.
Lord, give us eyes to bear the light.

We all went quiet down the Scallenge
Lest Police Inspector Drew should challenge.
But 'Spector Drew was sleeping sweet,
His head upon a charges sheet,
Under the gas-jet flaring full,
Snorting and snoring like a bull,
His bull cheeks puffed, his bull lips blowing,
His ugly yellow front teeth showing.
Just as we peeped we saw him fumble
And scratch his head, and shift, and mumble.

Down in the lane so thin and dark
The tan-yards stank of bitter bark,
The curate's pigeons gave a flutter,
A cat went courting down the gutter,
And none else stirred a foot or feather.
The houses put their heads together,
Talking, perhaps, so dark and sly,
Of all the folk they'd seen go by,
Children, and men and women, merry all,
Who'd some day pass that way to burial.
It was all dark, but at the turning
The Lion had a window burning.
So in we went and up the stairs,
Treading as still as cats and hares.

The way the stairs creaked made you wonder
If dead men's bones were hidden under.
At head of stairs upon the landing
A woman with a lamp was standing;
She greet each gent at head of stairs
With 'Step in, gents, and take your chairs.
The punch'll come when kettle bubble,
But don't make noise or there'll be trouble.'

'Twas Doxy Jane, a bouncing girl
With eyes all sparks and hair all curl,
And cheeks all red and lips all coal,
And thirst for men instead of soul.
She's trod her pathway to the fire.
Old Rivers had his nephew by her.

I step aside from Tom and Jimmy
To find if she'd a kiss to gimme.
I blew out lamp 'fore she could speak.
She said, 'If you ain't got a cheek,'
And then beside me in the dim,
'Did he beat you or you beat him?'
'Why, I beat him' (though that was wrong).
She said, 'You must be turble strong.
I'd be afraid you'd beat me, too.'
'You'd not,' I said, 'I wouldn't do.'
'Never?'
'No, never.'
'Never?'
'No.'
'O Saul. Here's missus. Let me go.'
It wasn't missus, so I didn't,
Whether I mid do or I midn't,
Until she'd promised we should meet
Next evening, six, at top of street,
When we could have a quiet talk
On that low wall up Worcester Walk.
And while we whispered there together
I give her silver for a feather
And felt a drunkenness like wine
And shut out Christ in husks and swine.
I felt the dart strike through my liver.
God punish me for't and forgive her.

Each one could be a Jesus mild,
Each one has been a little child,
A little child with laughing look,
A lovely white unwritten book;
A book that God will take, my friend,

As each goes out at journey's end.
The Lord who gave us Earth and Heaven
Takes that as thanks for all He's given.
The book he lent is given back
All blotted red and smutted black.

'Open the door,' said Jim, 'and call.'
Jane gasped 'They'll see me. Loose me, Saul.'
She pushed me by, and ducked downstair
With half the pins out of her hair.
I went inside the lit room rollin'
Her scented handkerchief I'd stolen.
'What would you fancy, Saul?' they said.
'A gin punch hot and then to bed.'
'Jane, fetch the punch bowl to the gemmen;
And mind you don't put too much lemon.
Our good friend Saul has had a fight of it,
Now smoke up, boys, and make a night of it.'

The room was full of men and stink
Of bad cigars and heavy drink.
Riley was nodding to the floor
And gurgling as he wanted more.
His mouth was wide, his face was pale,
His swollen face was sweating ale;
And one of those assembled Greeks
Had corked black crosses on his cheeks.
Thomas was having words with Goss,
He 'wouldn't pay, the fight was cross.'
And Goss told Tom that 'cross or no,
The bets go as the verdicts go,
By all I've ever heard or read of.
So pay, or else I'll knock your head off.'
Jim Gurvil said his smutty say
About a girl down Bye Street way.
And how the girl from Froggatt's circus
Died giving birth in Newent work'us.
And Dick told how the Dymock wench
Bore twins, poor thing, on Dog Hill bench;
And how he'd owned to one in court

And how Judge made him sorry for't.
Jock set a Jew's harp twanging drily;
'Gimme another cup,' said Riley.

A dozen more were in their glories
With laughs and smokes and smutty stories;
And Jimmy joked and took his sup
And sang his song of 'Up, come up.'
Jane brought the bowl of stewing gin
And poured the egg and lemon in,
And whisked it up and served it out
While bawdy questions went about.
Jack chucked her chin, and Jim accost her
With bits out of the 'Maid of Gloster.'
And fifteen arms went round her waist.
(And then men ask, Are Barmaids chaste?)

O young men, pray to be kept whole
From bringing down a weaker soul.
Your minute's joy so meet in doin'
May be the woman's door to ruin;
The door to wandering up and down,
A painted whore at half a crown.
The bright mind fouled, the beauty gay
All eaten out and fallen away,
By drunken days and weary tramps
From pub to pub by city lamps,
Till men despise the game they started
Till health and beauty are departed,
And in a slum the reeking hag
Mumbles a crust with toothy jag,
Or gets the river's help to end
The life too wrecked for man to mend.

We spat and smoked and took our swipe
Till Silas up and tap his pipe,
And begged us all to pay attention
Because he'd several things to mention.
We'd seen the fight (Hear, hear. That's you);
But still one task remained to do;

That task was his, he didn't shun it,
To give the purse to him as won it;
With this remark, from start to out
He'd never seen a brisker bout.
There was the purse. At that he'd leave it.
Let Kane come forward to receive it.

I took the purse and hemmed and bowed,
And called for gin punch for the crowd;
And when the second bowl was done,
I called, 'Let's have another one.'
Si's wife come in and sipped and sipped
(As women will) till she was pipped.
And Si hit Dicky Twot a clouter
Because he put his arm about her;
But after Si got overtasked
She sat and kissed whoever asked.
My Doxy Jane was splashed by this,
I took her on my knee to kiss.
And Tom cried out, 'O damn the gin;
Why can't we all have women in?
Bess Evans, now, or Sister Polly,
Or those two housemaids at the Folly?
Let someone nip to Biddy Price's,
They'd all come in a brace of trices.
Rose Davies, Sue, and Betsy Perks;
One man, one girl, and damn all Turks.'
But, no. 'More gin,' they cried; 'Come on.
We'll have the girls in when it's gone.'
So round the gin went, hot and heady,
Hot Hollands punch on top of deady.

Hot Hollands punch on top of stout
Puts madness in and wisdom out.
From drunken man to drunken man
The drunken madness raged and ran.
'I'm climber Joe who climbed the spire.'
'You're climber Joe the bloody liar.'
'Who says I lie?'
'I do.'

'You lie,
I climbed the spire and had a fly.'
I'm French Suzanne, the Circus Dancer,
I'm going to dance a bloody Lancer.'
If I'd my rights I'm Squire's heir.'
By rights I'd be a millionaire.'
By rights I'd be the lord of you,
But Farmer Scriggins had his do,
He done me, so I've had to hoove it,
I've got it all wrote down to prove it.
And one of these dark winter nights
He'll learn I mean to have my rights;
I'll bloody him a bloody fix,
I'll bloody burn his bloody ricks.'

From three long hours of gin and smokes,
And two girls' breath and fifteen blokes',
A warmish night, and windows shut,
The room stank like a fox's gut.
The heat and smell and drinking deep
Began to stun the gang to sleep.
Some fell downstairs to sleep on the mat,
Some snored it sodden where they sat.
Dick Twot had lost a tooth and wept,
But all the drunken others slept.
Jane slept beside me in the chair,
And I got up; I wanted air.

I opened window wide and leaned
Out of that pigstye of the fiend
And felt a cool wind go like grace
About the sleeping market-place.
The clock struck three, and sweetly, slowly,
The bells chimed Holy, Holy, Holy;
And in a second's pause there fell
The cold note of the chapel bell,
And then a cock crew, flapping wings,
And summat made me think of things
How long those ticking clocks had gone
From church and chapel, on and on,

Ticking the time out, ticking slow
To men and girls who'd come and go,
And how they ticked in belfry dark
When half the town was bishop's park,
And how they'd rung a chime full tilt
The night after the church was built,
And how that night was Lambert's Feast,
The night I'd fought and been a beast.
And how a change had come. And then
I thought, 'You tick to different men.'
What with the fight and what with drinking
And being awake alone there thinking,
My mind began to carp and tetter,
'If this life's all, the beasts are better.'
And then I thought, 'I wish I'd seen
The many towns this town has been;
I wish I knew if they'd a-got
A kind of summat we've a-not,
If them as built the church so fair
Were half the chaps folk say they were;
For they'd the skill to draw their plan,
And skill's a joy to any man;
And they'd the strength, not skill alone,
To build it beautiful in stone;
And strength and skill together thus...
O, they were happier men than us.

'But if they were, they had to die
The same as every one and I.
And no one lives again, but dies,
And all the bright goes out of eyes,
And all the skill goes out of hands,
And all the wise brain understands,
And all the beauty, all the power
Is cut down like a withered flower.
In all the show from birth to rest
I give the poor dumb cattle best.'

I wondered, then, why life should be,
And what would be the end of me

When youth and health and strength were gone
And cold old age came creeping on?
A keeper's gun? The Union ward?
Or that new quod at Hereford?
And looking round I felt disgust
At all the nights of drink and lust,
And all the looks of all the swine
Who'd said that they were friends of mine;
And yet I knew, when morning came,
The morning would be just the same,
For I'd have drinks and Jane would meet me
And drunken Silas Jones would greet me,
And I'd risk quod and keeper's gun
Till all the silly game was done.
'For parson chaps are mad supposin'
A chap can change the road he's chosen.'
And then the Devil whispered 'Saul,
Why should you want to live at all?
Why fret and sweat and try to mend?
It's all the same thing in the end.
But when it's done,' he said, 'it's ended.
Why stand it, since it can't be mended?'
And in my heart I heard him plain,
'Throw yourself down and end it, Kane.'

'Why not?' said I. 'Why not? But no.
I won't. I've never had my go.
I've not had all the world can give.
Death by and by, but first I'll live.
The world owes me my time of times,
And that time's coming now, by crimes.'

A madness took me then. I felt
I'd like to hit the world a belt.
I felt that I could fly through air,
A screaming star with blazing hair,
A rushing comet, crackling, numbing
The folk with fear of judgment coming,
A 'Lijah in a fiery car
Coming to tell folk what they are.

'That's what I'll do,' I shouted loud,
I'll tell this sanctimonious crowd,
This town of window-peeping, prying,
Maligning, peering, hinting, lying,
Male and female human blots
Who would, but daren't be, whores and sots,
That they're so steeped in petty vice
That they're less excellent than lice,
That they're so soaked in petty virtue
That touching one of them will dirt you,
Dirt you with the stain of mean
Cheating trade and going between,
Pinching, starving, scraping, hoarding
Spying through the chinks of boarding
To see if Sue the prentice lean
Dares to touch the margarine.
Fawning, cringing, oiling boots,
Raging in the crowd's pursuits,
Flinging stones at all the Stephens,
Standing firm with all the evens,
Making hell for all the odd,
All the lonely ones of God,
Those poor lonely ones who find
Dogs more mild than human kind.
For dogs,' I said, 'are nobles born
To most of you, you cockled corn.
I've known dogs to leave their dinner,
Nosing a kind heart in a sinner.
Poor old Crafty wagged his tail
The day I first came home from jail,
When all my folk, so primly clad,
Glowered black and thought me mad,
And muttered how they'd been respected,
While I was what they'd all expected.
(I've thought of that old dog for years,
And of how near I come to tears.)

But you, you minds of bread and cheese,
Are less divine than that dog's fleas.
You suck blood from kindly friends,

And kill them when it serves your ends.
Double traitors, double black,
Stabbing only in the back,
Stabbing with the knives you borrow
From the friends you bring to sorrow.
You stab all that's true and strong;
Truth and strength you say are wrong;
Meek and mild, and sweet and creeping,
Repeating, canting, cadging, peeping,
That's the art and that's the life
To win a man his neighbour's wife.
All that's good and all that's true,
You kill that, so I'll kill you.'

At that I tore my clothes in shreds
And hurled them on the window leads;
I flung my boots through both the winders
And knocked the glass to little flinders;
The punch bowl and the tumblers followed,
And then I seized the lamps and holloed.
And down the stairs, and tore back bolts,
As mad as twenty blooded colts;
And out into the street I pass,
As mad as two-year-olds at grass,
A naked madman waving grand
A blazing lamp in either hand.
I yelled like twenty drunken sailors,
'The devil's come among the tailors.'
A blaze of flame behind me streamed,
And then I clashed the lamps and screamed
'I'm Satan, newly come from hell.'
And then I spied the fire-bell.

I've been a ringer, so I know
How best to make a big bell go.
So on to bell-rope swift I swoop,
And stick my one foot in the loop
And heave a down-swig till I groan,
'Awake, you swine, you devil's own.'

I made the fire-bell awake,
I felt the bell-rope throb and shake;
I felt the air mingle and clang
And beat the walls a muffled bang,
And stifle back and boom and bay
Like muffled peals on Boxing Day,
And then surge up and gather shape,
And spread great pinions and escape;
And each great bird of clanging shrieks
O Fire, Fire! from iron beaks.
My shoulders cracked to send around
Those shrieking birds made out of sound
With news of fire in their bills.
(They heard 'em plain beyond Wall Hills.)

Up go the winders, out come heads,
I heard the springs go creak in beds;
But still I heave and sweat and tire,
And still the clang goes 'Fire, Fire!'
'Where is it, then? Who is it, there?
You ringer, stop, and tell us where.'
'Run round and let the Captain know.'
'It must be bad, he's ringing so.'

'It's in the town, I see the flame;
Look there! Look there, how red it came.'
'Where is it, then 'O stop the bell.'
I stopped and called: 'It's fire of hell;
And this is Sodom and Gomorrah,
And now I'll burn you up, begorra.'

By this the firemen were mustering,
The half-dressed stable men were flustering,
Backing the horses out of stalls
While this man swears and that man bawls,
'Don't take th'old mare. Back, Toby, back.
Back, Lincoln. Where's the fire, Jack?'
'Damned if I know. Out Preston way.'
'No. It's at Chancey's Pitch, they say.'
'It's sixteen ricks at Pauntley burnt.'

You back old Darby out, I durn't.'
They ran the big red engine out,
And put 'em to with damn and shout.
And then they start to raise the shire,
'Who brought the news, and where's the fire?'
They'd moonlight, lamps, and gas to light 'em.
I give a screech-owl's screech to fright 'em,
And snatch from underneath their noses
The nozzles of the fire hoses.
'I am the fire. Back, stand back,
Or else I'll fetch your skulls a crack;
D'you see these copper nozzles here?
They weigh ten pounds apiece, my dear;
I'm fire of hell come up this minute
To burn this town, and all that's in it.
To burn you dead and burn you clean,
You cogwheels in a stopped machine,
You hearts of snakes, and brains of pigeons,
You dead devout of dead religions,
You offspring of the hen and ass,
By Pilate ruled, and Caiaphas.
Now your account is totted. Learn
Hell's flames are loose and you shall burn.'

At that I leaped and screamed and ran,
I heard their cries go 'Catch him, man.'
'Who was it?' 'Down him.' 'Out him, Ern.
'Duck him at pump, we'll see who'll burn.'
A policeman clutched, a fireman clutched,
A dozen others snatched and touched.
'By God, he's stripped down to his buff.'
'By God, we'll make him warm enough.'
'After him.' 'Catch him,' 'Out him,' 'Scrob him.
'We'll give him hell.' 'By God, we'll mob him.'
'We'll duck him, scrout him, flog him, fratch him.
'All right,' I said. 'But first you'll catch him.'

The men who don't know to the root
The joy of being swift of foot,
Have never known divine and fresh

The glory of the gift of flesh,
Nor felt the feet exult, nor gone
Along a dim road, on and on,
Knowing again the bursting glows,
The mating hare in April knows,
Who tingles to the pads with mirth
At being the swiftest thing on earth.
O, if you want to know delight,
Run naked in an autumn night,
And laugh, as I laughed then, to find
A running rabble drop behind,
And whang, on every door you pass,
Two copper nozzles, tipped with brass,
And doubly whang at every turning,
And yell, 'All hell's let loose, and burning.'

I beat my brass and shouted fire
At doors of parson, lawyer, squire,
At all three doors I threshed and slammed
And yelled aloud that they were damned.
I clodded squire's glass with turves
Because he spring-gunned his preserves.
Through parson's glass my nozzle swishes
Because he stood for loaves and fishes,
But parson's glass I spared a tittle.
He give me an orange once when little,
And he who gives a child a treat
Makes joy-bells ring in Heaven's street,
And he who gives a child a home
Builds palaces in Kingdom come,
And she who gives a baby birth
Brings Saviour Christ again to Earth,
For life is joy, and mind is fruit,
And body's precious earth and root.
But lawyer's glass--well, never mind,
Th'old Adam's strong in me, I find.
God pardon man, and may God's son
Forgive the evil things I've done.

What more? By Dirty Lane I crept

Back to the Lion, where I slept.
The raging madness hot and floodin'
Boiled itself out and left me sudden,
Left me worn out and sick and cold,
Aching as though I'd all grown old;
So there I lay, and there they found me
On door-mat, with a curtain round me.
Si took my heels and Jane my head
And laughed, and carried me to bed.
And from the neighbouring street they reskied
My boots and trousers, coat and weskit;
They bath-bricked both the nozzles bright
To be mementoes of the night,
And knowing what I should awake with
They flannelled me a quart to slake with,
And sat and shook till half-past two
Expecting Police Inspector Drew.

I woke and drank, and went to meat
In clothes still dirty from the street.
Down in the bar I heard 'em tell
How someone rang the fire-bell,
And how th'inspector's search had thriven,
And how five pounds reward was given.
And Shepherd Boyce, of Marley, glad us
By saying it was blokes from mad'us,
Or two young rips lodged at the Prince
Whom none had seen nor heard of since,
Or that young blade from Worcester Walk
(You know how country people talk).

Young Joe the ostler come in sad,
He said th'old mare had bit his dad.
He said there'd come a blazing screeching
Daft Bible-prophet chap a-preaching,
Had put th'old mare in such a taking
She'd thought the bloody earth was quaking.
And others come and spread a tale
Of cut-throats out of Gloucester jail,
And how we needed extra cops

With all them Welsh come picking hops;
With drunken Welsh in all our sheds
We might be murdered in our beds.
By all accounts, both men and wives
Had had the scare up of their lives.

I ate and drank and gathered strength,
And stretched along the bench full length,
Or crossed to window seat to pat
Black Silas Jones's little cat.
At four I called, 'You devil's own,
The second trumpet shall be blown.
The second trump, the second blast;
Hell's flames are loosed, and judgment's passed.
Too late for mercy now. Take warning
I'm death and hell and Judgment morning.'
I hurled the bench into the settle,
I banged the table on the kettle,
I sent Joe's quart of cider spinning.
'Lo, here begins my second inning.'
Each bottle, mug, and jug and pot
I smashed to crocks in half a tot;
And Joe, and Si, and Nick, and Percy
I rolled together topsy versy.
And as I ran I heard 'em call,
'Now damn to hell, what's gone with Saul?'

Out into street I ran uproarious
The devil dancing in me glorious.
And as I ran I yell and shriek
'Come on, now, turn the other cheek.'
Across the way by almshouse pump
I see old puffing parson stump.
Old parson, red-eyed as a ferret
From nightly wrestlings with the spirit;
I ran across, and barred his path.
His turkey gills went red as wrath
And then he froze, as parsons can.
'The police will deal with you, my man.'
'Not yet,' said I, 'not yet they won't;

And now you'll hear me, like or don't.
The English Church both is and was
A subsidy of Caiaphas.
I don't believe in Prayer nor Bible,
They're lies all through, and you're a libel,
A libel on the Devil's plan
When first he miscreated man.
You mumble through a formal code
To get which martyrs burned and glowed.
I look on martyrs as mistakes,
But still they burned for it at stakes;
Your only fire's the jolly fire
Where you can guzzle port with Squire,
And back and praise his damned opinions
About his temporal dominions.
You let him give the man who digs,
A filthy hut unfit for pigs,
Without a well, without a drain,
With mossy thatch that lets in rain,
Without a 'lotment, 'less he rent it,
And never meat, unless he scent it,
But weekly doles of 'leven shilling
To make a grown man strong and willing,
To do the hardest work on earth
And feed his wife when she gives birth,
And feed his little children's bones.
I tell you, man, the Devil groans.
With all your main and all your might
You back what is against what's right;
You let the Squire do things like these,
You back him in't and give him ease,
You take his hand, and drink his wine,
And he's a hog, but you're a swine.
For you take gold to teach God's ways
And teach man how to sing God's praise.
And now I'll tell you what you teach
In downright honest English speech.

You teach the ground-down starving man
That Squire's greed's Jehovah's plan.

You get his learning circumvented
Lest it should make him discontented
(Better a brutal, starving nation
Than men with thoughts above their station),
You let him neither read nor think,
You goad his wretched soul to drink
And then to jail, the drunken boor;
O sad intemperance of the poor.
You starve his soul till it's rapscallion,
Then blame his flesh for being stallion.
You send your wife around to paint
The golden glories of "restraint."
How moral exercise bewild'rin'
Would soon result in fewer children.
You work a day in Squire's fields
And see what sweet restraint it yields;
A woman's day at turnip picking,
Your heart's too fat for plough or ricking.

And you whom luck taught French and Greek
Have purple flaps on either cheek,
A stately house, and time for knowledge,
And gold to send your sons to college,
That pleasant place, where getting learning
Is also key to money earning.
But quite your damn'dest want of grace
Is what you do to save your face;
The way you sit astride the gates
By padding wages out of rates;
Your Christmas gifts of shoddy blankets
That every working soul may thank its
Loving parson, loving squire
Through whom he can't afford a fire.
Your well-packed bench, your prison pen,
To keep them something less than men;
Your friendly clubs to help 'em bury,
Your charities of midwifery.
Your bidding children duck and cap
To them who give them workhouse pap.
O, what you are, and what you preach,

And what you do, and what you teach
Is not God's Word, nor honest schism,
But Devil's cant and pauperism.'

By this time many folk had gathered
To listen to me while I blathered;
I said my piece, and when I'd said it,
I'll do old purple parson credit,
He sunk (as sometimes parsons can)
His coat's excuses in the man.
You think that Squire and I are kings
Who made the existing state of things,
And made it ill. I answer, No,
States are not made, nor patched; they grow,
Grow slow through centuries of pain
And grow correctly in the main,
But only grow by certain laws
Of certain bits in certain jaws.
You want to doctor that. Let be.
You cannot patch a growing tree.
Put these two words beneath your hat,
These two: securus judicat.

The social states of human kinds
Are made by multitudes of minds.
And after multitudes of years
A little human growth appears
Worth having, even to the soul
Who sees most plain it's not the whole.
This state is dull and evil, both,
I keep it in the path of growth;
You think the Church an outworn fetter;
Kane, keep it, till you've built a better.
And keep the existing social state;
I quite agree it's out of date,
One does too much, another shirks,
Unjust, I grant; but still ... it works.
To get the whole world out of bed
And washed, and dressed, and warmed, and fed,
To work, and back to bed again,

Believe me, Saul, costs worlds of pain.
Then, as to whether true or sham
That book of Christ, Whose priest I am;
The Bible is a lie, say you,
Where do you stand, suppose it true?

Good-bye. But if you've more to say,
My doors are open night and day.
Meanwhile, my friend, 'twould be no sin
To mix more water in your gin.
We're neither saints nor Philip Sidneys,
But mortal men with mortal kidneys.'
He took his snuff, and wheezed a greeting,
And waddled off to mothers' meeting;
I hung my head upon my chest,
I give old purple parson best.
For while the Plough tips round the Pole
The trained mind outs the upright soul,
As Jesus said the trained mind might,
Being wiser than the sons of light,
But trained men's minds are spread so thin
They let all sorts of darkness in;
Whatever light man finds they doubt it,
They love not light, but talk about it.

But parson'd proved to people's eyes
That I was drunk, and he was wise;
And people grinned and women tittered,
And little children mocked and twittered
So blazing mad, I stalked to bar
To show how noble drunkards are,
And guzzled spirits like a beast,
To show contempt for Church and priest,
Until, by six, my wits went round
Like hungry pigs in parish pound.
At half-past six, rememb'ring Jane,
I staggered into street again
With mind made up (or primed with gin)
To bash the cop who'd run me in;
For well I knew I'd have to cock up

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My legs that night inside the lock-up,
And it was my most fixed intent
To have a fight before I went.
Our Fates are strange, and no one knows his;
Our lovely Saviour Christ disposes.

Jane wasn't where we'd planned, the jade.
She'd thought me drunk and hadn't stayed.
So I went up the Walk to look for her
And lingered by the little brook for her,
And dowsed my face, and drank at spring,
And watched two wild duck on the wing.

The moon come pale, the wind come cool,
A big pike leapt in Lower Pool,
The peacock screamed, the clouds were straking,
My cut cheek felt the weather breaking;
An orange sunset waned and thinned
Foretelling rain and western wind,
And while I watched I heard distinct
The metals on the railway clinked.
The blood-edged clouds were all in tatters,
The sky and earth seemed mad as hatters;
They had a death look, wild and odd,
Of something dark foretold by God.
And seeing it so, I felt so shaken
I wouldn't keep the road I'd taken,
But wandered back towards the inn
Resolved to brace myself with gin.
And as I walked, I said, 'It's strange,
There's Death let loose to-night, and Change.'

In Cabbage Walk I made a haul
Of two big pears from lawyer's wall,
And, munching one, I took the lane
Back into Market-place again.

Lamp-lighter Dick had passed the turning
And all the Homend lamps were burning,
The windows shone, the shops were busy,

But that strange Heaven made me dizzy.
The sky had all God's warning writ
In bloody marks all over it,
And over all I thought there was
A ghastly light beside the gas.
The Devil's tasks and Devil's rages
Were giving me the Devil's wages.

In Market-place it's always light,
The big shop windows make it bright;
And in the press of people buying
I spied a little fellow crying
Because his mother'd gone inside
And left him there, and so he cried.
And mother'd beat him when she found him,
And mother's whip would curl right round him,
And mother'd say he'd done't to crost her,
Though there being crowds about he'd lost her.

Lord, give to men who are old and rougher
The things that little children suffer,
And let keep bright and undented
The young years of the little child.
I pat his head at edge of street
And gi'm my second pear to eat.
Right under lamp, I pat his head,
'I'll stay till mother come,' I said,
And stay I did, and joked and talked,
And shoppers wondered as they walked.
'There's that Saul Kane, the drunken blaggard,
Talking to little Jimmy Jaggard.
The drunken blaggard reeks of drink.'
'Whatever will his mother think?'
'Wherever has his mother gone?
Nip round to Mrs Jaggard's, John,
And say her Jimmy's out again,
In Market-place, with boozer Kane.'
'When he come out to-day he staggered.
O, Jimmy Jaggard, Jimmy Jaggard.'
'His mother's gone inside to bargain,

'Run in and tell her, Polly Margin,
And tell her poacher Kane is tipsy
And selling Jimmy to a gipsy.'

'Run in to Mrs Jaggard, Ellen,
Or else, dear knows, there'll be no tellin',
And don't dare leave yer till you've fount her,
You'll find her at the linen counter.'

I told a tale, to Jim's delight,
Of where the tom-cats go by night,
And how when moonlight come they went
Among the chimneys black and bent,
From roof to roof, from house to house,
With little baskets full of mouse
All red and white, both joint and chop
Like meat out of a butcher's shop;
Then all along the wall they creep
And everyone is fast asleep,
And honey-hunting moths go by,
And by the bread-batch crickets cry;
Then on they hurry, never waiting
To lawyer's backyard cellar grating
Where Jaggard's cat, with clever paw,
Unhooks a broke-brick's secret door;
Then down into the cellar black,
Across the wood slug's slimy track,
Into an old cask's quiet hollow,
Where they've got seats for what's to follow;
Then each tom-cat lights little candles,
And O, the stories and the scandals,
And O, the songs and Christmas carols,
And O, the milk from little barrels.
They light a fire fit for roasting
(And how good mouse-meat smells when toasting),
Then down they sit to merry feast
While moon goes west and sun comes east.

Sometimes they make so merry there
Old lawyer come to head of stair

To 'fend with fist and poker took firm
His parchments channelled by the bookworm,
And all his deeds, and all his packs
Of withered ink and sealing wax;
And there he stands, with candle raised,
And listens like a man amazed,
Or like a ghost a man stands dumb at,
He says, 'Hush! Hush! I'm sure there's summat!'
He hears outside the brown owl call,
He hears the death-tick tap the wall,
The gnawing of the wainscot mouse,
The creaking up and down the house,
The unhooked window's hinges ranging,
The sounds that say the wind is changing.
At last he turns, and shakes his head,
'It's nothing, I'll go back to bed.'

And just then Mrs Jaggard came
To view and end her Jimmy's shame.

She made one rush and gi'm a bat
And shook him like a dog a rat.
'I can't turn round but what you're straying.
I'll give you tales and gipsy playing.
I'll give you wand'ring off like this
And listening to whatever 't is,
You'll laugh the little side of the can,
You'll have the whip for this, my man;
And not a bite of meat nor bread
You'll touch before you go to bed.
Some day you'll break your mother's heart,
After God knows she's done her part,
Working her arms off day and night
Trying to keep your collars white.
Look at your face, too, in the street.
What dirty filth 've you found to eat?
Now don't you blubber here, boy, or
I'll give you sum't to blubber for.'
She snatched him off from where we stand
And knocked the pear-core from his hand,

And looked at me, 'You Devil's limb,
How dare you talk to Jaggard's Jim;
You drunken, poaching, boozing brute, you.
If Jaggard was a man he'd shoot you.'
She glared all this, but didn't speak,
She gasped, white hollows in her cheek;
Jimmy was writhing, screaming wild,
The shoppers thought I'd killed the child.

I had to speak, so I begun.
'You'd oughtn't beat your little son;
He did no harm, but seeing him there
I talked to him and gi'm a pear;
I'm sure the poor child meant no wrong,
It's all my fault he stayed so long,
He'd not have stayed, mum, I'll be bound
If I'd not chanced to come around.
It's all my fault he stayed, not his.
I kept him here, that's how it is.'
'Oh! And how dare you, then?' says she,
'How dare you tempt my boy from me?
How dare you do't, you drunken swine,
Is he your child or is he mine?
A drunken sot they've had the beak to,
Has got his dirty whores to speak to,
His dirty mates with whom he drink,
Not little children, one would think.
Look on him, there,' she says, 'look on him
And smell the stinking gin upon him,
The lowest sot, the drunk'nest liar,
The dirtiest dog in all the shire:
Nice friends for any woman's son
After ten years, and all she's done.

'For I've had eight, and buried five,
And only three are left alive.
I've given them all we could afford,
I've taught them all to fear the Lord.
They've had the best we had to give,
The only three the Lord let live.

For Minnie whom I loved the worst
Died mad in childbed with her first.
And John and Mary died of measles,
And Rob was drownded at the Teasels.
And little Nan, dear little sweet,
A cart run over in the street;
Her little shift was all one stain,
I prayed God put her out of pain.
And all the rest are gone or going
The road to hell, and there's no knowing
For all I've done and all I've made them
I'd better not have overlaid them.
For Susan went the ways of shame
The time the 'till'ry regiment came,
And t'have her child without a father
I think I'd have her buried rather.
And Dicky boozes, God forgimme,
And now't's to be the same with Jimmy.
And all I've done and all I've bore
Has made a drunkard and a whore,
A bastard boy who wasn't meant,
And Jimmy gwine where Dicky went;
For Dick began the self-same way
And my old hairs are going gray,
And my poor man's a withered knee,
And all the burden falls on me.

I've washed eight little children's limbs,
I've taught eight little souls their hymns,
I've risen sick and lain down pinched
And borne it all and never flinched;
But to see him, the town's disgrace,
With God's commandments broke in's face,
Who never worked, not he, nor earned,
Nor will do till the seas are burned,
Who never did since he was whole
A hand's turn for a human soul,
But poached and stole and gone with women,
And swilled down gin enough to swim in;
To see him only lift one finger

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To make my little Jimmy linger.

In spite of all his mother's prayers,
And all her ten long years of cares,
And all her broken spirit's cry
That drunkard's finger puts them by,
And Jimmy turns. And now I see
That just as Dick was, Jim will be,
And all my life will have been vain.
I might have spared myself the pain,
And done the world a blessed riddance
If I'd a drowned 'em all like kittens.
And he the sot, so strong and proud,
Who'd make white shirts of's mother's shroud,
He laughs now, it's a joke to him,
Though it's the gates of hell to Jim.

I've had my heart burnt out like coal,
And drops of blood wrung from soul
Day in, day out, in pain and tears,
For five and twenty wretched years;
And he, he's ate the fat and sweet,
And loafed and spat at top of street,
And drunk and leched from day till morrow,
And never known a moment's sorrow.

He come out drunk from th'inn to look
The day my little Ann was took;
He sat there drinking, glad and gay,
The night my girl was led astray;
He praised my Dick for singing well,
The night Dick took the road to hell;
And when my corpse goes stiff and blind,
Leaving four helpless souls behind,
He will be there still, drunk and strong.
It do seem hard. It do seem wrong.
But "Woe to him by whom the offence,"
Says our Lord Jesus' Testaments.
Whatever seems, God doth not slumber
Though He lets pass times without number.

He'll come with trump to call His own,
And this world's way'll be overthrown.
He'll come with glory and with fire
To cast great darkness on the liar,
To burn the drunkard and the treacher,
And do His judgment on the lecher,
To glorify the spirits' faces
Of those whose ways were stony places,
Who chose with Ruth the better part;
O Lord, I see Thee as Thou art,
O God, the fiery four-edged sword,
The thunder of the wrath outpoured,
The fiery four-faced creatures burning,
And all the four-faced wheels all turning,
Coming with trump and fiery saint.
Jim, take me home, I'm turning faint.'
They went, and some cried, 'Good old sod.
She put it to him straight, by God.'

Summat she was, or looked, or said,
Went home and made me hang my head.
I slunk away into the night
Knowing deep down that she was right.
I'd often heard religious ranters,
And put them down as windy canters,
But this old mother made me see
The harm I done by being me,
Being both strong and given to sin
I 'tracted weaker vessels in.

So back to bar to get more drink,
I didn't dare begin to think,
And there were drinks and drunken singing,
As though this life were dice for flinging;
Dice to be flung, and nothing furder,
And Christ's blood just another murder.
Come on, drinks round, salue, drink hearty.
Now, Jane, the punch-bowl for the party.
If any here won't drink with me
I'll knock his bloody eyes out. See?

Come on, cigars round, rum for mine,
Sing us a smutty song, some swine.'
But though the drinks and songs went round
That thought remained, it was not drowned.
And when I'd rise to get a light
I'd think, 'What's come to me to-night?'

There's always crowds when drinks are standing.
The house doors slammed along the landing,
The rising wind was gusty yet,
And those who came in late were wet;
And all my body's nerves were snappin'
With sense of summat 'bout to happen,
And music seemed to come and go
And seven lights danced in a row.

There used to be a custom then,
Miss Bourne, the Friend, went round at ten
To all the pubs in all the place
To bring the drunkard's soul to grace;
Some sulked, of course, and some were stirred,
But none gave her a dirty word.
A tall pale woman, grey and bent,
Folk said of her that she was sent.
She wore Friend's clothes, and women smiled,
But she'd a heart just like a child.
She come to us near closing time
When we were at some smutty rhyme,
And I was mad and ripe for fun;
I wouldn't a minded what I done,
So when she come so prim and grey
I pound the bar and sing, 'Hooray,
Here's Quaker come to bless and kiss us,
Come, have a gin and bitters, missus.
Or may be Quaker girls so prim
Would rather start a bloody hymn.
Now, Dick, oblige. A hymn, you swine,
Pipe up the "Officer of the Line,"
A song to make one's belly ache,
Or "Nell and Roger at the Wake,"

Or that sweet song, the talk in town,
"The lady fair and Abel Brown."
'O, who's that knocking at the door."
Miss Bourne'll play the music score.'
The men stood dumb as cattle are,
They grinned, but thought I'd gone too far,
There come a hush and no one break it,
They wondered how Miss Bourne would take it.
She up to me with black eyes wide,
She looked as though her spirit cried;
She took my tumbler from the bar
Beside where all the matches are
And poured it out upon the floor dust,
Among the fag-ends, spit and sawdust.

'Saul Kane,' she said, 'when next you drink,
Do me the gentleness to think
That every drop of drink accursed
Makes Christ within you die of thirst,
That every dirty word you say
Is one more flint upon His way,
Another thorn about His head,
Another mock by where He tread,
Another nail, another cross.
All that you are is that Christ's loss.'
The clock run down and struck a chime
And Mrs Si said, 'Closing time.'

The wet was pelting on the pane
And something broke inside my brain,
I heard the rain drip from the gutters
And Silas putting up the shutters,
While one by one the drinkers went;
I got a glimpse of what it meant,
How she and I had stood before
In some old town by some old door
Waiting intent while someone knocked
Before the door for ever locked;
She was so white that I was scared,
A gas-jet, turned the wrong way, flared,

And Silas snapped the bars in place.
Miss Bourne stood white and searched my face.
When Silas done, with ends of tunes
He 'gan a-gathering the spittoons,
His wife primmed lips and took the till.
Miss Bourne stood still and I stood still,
And 'Tick. Slow. Tick. Slow' went the clock.
She said, 'He waits until you knock.'
She turned at that and went out swift,
Si grinned and winked, his missus sniffed.

I heard her clang the Lion door,
I marked a drink-drop roll to floor;
It took up scraps of sawdust, furry,
And crinkled on, a half inch, blurry;
A drop from my last glass of gin;
And someone waiting to come in,
A hand upon the door latch gropin'
Knocking the man inside to open.
I know the very words I said,
They bayed like bloodhounds in my head.
'The water's going out to sea
And there's a great moon calling me;
But there's a great sun calls the moon,
And all God's bells will carol soon
For joy and glory and delight
Of someone coming home to-night.'

Out into darkness, out to night,
My flaring heart gave plenty light,
So wild it was there was no knowing
Whether the clouds or stars were blowing;
Blown chimney pots and folk blown blind
And puddles glimmering like my mind,
And chinking glass from windows banging,
And inn signs swung like people hanging,
And in my heart the drink unpriced,
The burning cataracts of Christ.

I did not think, I did not strive,

The deep peace burnt my me alive;
The bolted door had broken in,
I knew that I had done with sin.
I knew that Christ had given me birth
To brother all the souls on earth,
And every bird and every beast
Should share the crumbs broke at the feast.

O glory of the lighted mind.
How dead I'd been, how dumb, how blind.
The station brook, to my new eyes,
Was babbling out of Paradise;
The waters rushing from the rain
Were singing Christ has risen again.
I thought all earthly creatures knelt
From rapture of the joy I felt.
The narrow station-wall's brick ledge,
The wild hop withering in the hedge,
The lights in huntsman's upper storey
Were parts of an eternal glory,
Were God's eternal garden flowers.
I stood in bliss at this for hours.

O glory of the lighted soul.
The dawn came up on Bradlow Knoll,
The dawn with glittering on the grasses,
The dawn which pass and never passes.

'It's dawn,' I said, 'and chimney's smoking,
And all the blessed fields are soaking.
It's dawn, and there's an engine shunting;
And hounds, for huntsman's going hunting.
It's dawn, and I must wander north
Along the road Christ led me forth.'

So up the road I wander slow
Past where the snowdrops used to grow
With celandines in early springs,
When rainbows were triumphant things
And dew so bright and flowers so glad,

Eternal joy to lass and lad.
And past the lovely brook I paced,
The brook whose source I never traced,
The brook, the one of two which rise
In my green dream in Paradise,
In wells where heavenly buckets clink
To give God's wandering thirsty drink
By those clean cots of carven stone
Where the clear water sings alone.
Then down, past that white-blossomed pond,
And past the chestnut trees beyond,
And past the bridge the fishers knew,
Where yellow flag flowers once grew,
Where we'd go gathering cops of clover,
In sunny June times long since over.

O clover-cops half white, half red,
O beauty from beyond the dead.
O blossom, key to earth and heaven,
O souls that Christ has new forgiven.

Then down the hill to gipsies' pitch
By where the brook clucks in the ditch.
A gipsy's camp was in the copse,
Three felted tents, with beehive tops,
And round black marks where fires had been,
And one old waggon painted green,
And three ribbed horses wrenching grass,
And three wild boys to watch me pass,
And one old woman by the fire
Hulking a rabbit warm from wire.
I loved to see the horses bait.
I felt I walked at Heaven's gate,
That Heaven's gate was opened wide
Yet still the gipsies camped outside.
The waste souls will prefer the wild,
Long after life is meek and mild.
Perhaps when man has entered in
His perfect city free from sin,
The campers will come past the walls

With old lame horses full of galls,
And waggons hung about with withies,
And burning coke in tinkers' stithies,
And see the golden town, and choose,
And think the wild too good to lose.
And camp outside, as these camped then
With wonder at the entering men.
So past, and past the stone-heap white
That dewberry trailers hid from sight,
And down the field so full of springs,
Where mewing peewits clap their wings,
And past the trap made for the mill
Into the field below the hill.
There was a mist along the stream,
A wet mist, dim, like in a dream;
I heard the heavy breath of cows,
And waterdrops from th'alder boughs;
And eels, or snakes, in dripping grass
Whipping aside to let me pass.
The gate was backed against the ryme
To pass the cows at milking time.
And by the gate as I went out
A moldwarp rooted earth wi 's snout.
A few steps up the Callows' Lane
Brought me above the mist again;
The two great fields arose like death
Above the mists of human breath.

All earthly things that blessed morning
Were everlasting joy and warning.
The gate was Jesus' way made plain,
The mole was Satan foiled again,
Black blinded Satan snouting way
Along the red of Adam's clay;
The mist was error and damnation,
The lane the road unto salvation,
Out of the mist into the light;
O blessed gift of inner sight.
The past was faded like a dream;
There come the jingling of a team,

A ploughman's voice, a clink of chain,
Slow hoofs, and harness under strain.
Up the slow slope a team came bowing,
Old Callow at his autumn ploughing,
Old Callow, stooped above the hales.
Ploughing the stubble into wales;
His grave eyes looking straight ahead,
Shearing a long straight furrow red;
His plough-foot high to give it earth
To bring new food for men to birth.

O wet red swathe of earth laid bare,
O truth, O strength, O gleaming share,
O patient eyes that watch the goal,
O ploughman of the sinner's soul.
O Jesus, drive the coulter deep
To plough my living man from sleep.

Slow up the hill the plough team plod,
Old Callow at the task of God,
Helped by man's wit, helped by the brute
Turning a stubborn clay to fruit,
His eyes for ever on some sign
To help him plough a perfect line.
At top of rise the plough team stopped,
The fore-horse bent his head and cropped
Then the chains chack, the brasses jingle,
The lean reins gather through the cringle,
The figures move against the sky,
The clay wave breaks as they go by.
I kneeled there in the muddy fallow,
I knew that Christ was there with Callow,
That Christ was standing there with me,
That Christ had taught me what to be,
That I should plough, and as I ploughed
My Saviour Christ would sing aloud,
And as I drove the clods apart
Christ would be ploughing in my heart,
Through rest-harrow and bitter roots,
Through all my bad life's rotten fruits.

O Christ who holds the open gate,
O Christ who drives the furrow straight,
O Christ, the plough, O Christ, the laughter
Of holy white birds flying after,
Lo, all my heart's field red and torn,
And Thou wilt bring the young green corn,
The young green corn divinely springing,
The young green corn for ever singing;
And when the field is fresh and fair
Thy blessed feet shall glitter there.
And we will walk the weeded field,
And tell the golden harvest's yield,
The corn that makes the holy bread
By which the soul of man is fed,
The holy bread, the food unpriced,
Thy everlasting mercy, Christ.

The share will jar on many a stone,
Thou wilt not let me stand alone;
And I shall feel (Thou wilt not fail),
Thy hand on mine upon the hale.

Near Bullen Bank, on Gloucester Road,
Thy everlasting mercy showed
The ploughman patient on the hill
For ever there, for ever still,
Ploughing the hill with steady yoke
Of pine-trees lightning-struck and broke.
I've marked the May Hill ploughman stay
There on his hill, day after day
Driving his team against the sky,
While men and women live and die.

And now and then he seems to stoop
To clear the coulter with the scoop,
Or touch an ox to haw or gee
While Severn stream goes out to sea.
The sea with all her ships and sails,
And that great smoky port in Wales,
And Gloucester tower bright i' the sun,

All know that patient wandering one.
And sometimes when they burn the leaves
The bonfires' smoking trails and heaves,
And girt red flames twink and twire
As though he ploughed the hill afire.
And in men's hearts in many lands
A spiritual ploughman stands
For ever waiting, waiting now,
The heart's 'Put in, man, zook the plough.'

By this the sun was all one glitter,
The little birds were all in twitter;
Out of a tuft a little lark
Went higher up than I could mark,
His little throat was all one thirst
To sing until his heart should burst,
To sing aloft in golden light
His song from blue air out of sight.
The mist drove by, and now the cows
Came plodding up to milking house,
Followed by Frank, the Callows' cowman,
Who whistled 'Adam was a ploughman.'
There come such cawing from the rooks,
Such running chuck from little brooks,
One thought it March, just budding green
With hedgerows full of celandine.
An otter out of stream and played,
Two hares come loping up and stayed;
Wide-eyed and tender-eared but bold.
Sheep bleated up by Penny's fold.
I heard a partridge covey call;
The morning sun was bright on all.

Down the long slope the plough team drove
The tossing rooks arose and hove.
A stone struck on the share. A word
Came to the team. The red earth stirred.
I crossed the hedge by shooter's gap,
I hitched my boxer's belt a strap,
I jumped the ditch and crossed the fallow

I took the hales from farmer Callow.

How swift the summer goes,
Forget-me-not, pink, rose.
The young grass when I started
And now the hay is carted,
And now my song is ended,
And all the summer spended;
The blackbird's second brood
Routs beech-leaves in the wood
The pink and rose have speeded,
Forget-me-not has seeded.
Only the winds that blew,
The rain that makes things new,
The earth that hides things old,
And blessings manifold.

O lovely lily clean,
O lily springing green,
O lily bursting white,
Dear lily of delight,
Spring in my heart agen
That I may flower to men.

GREAT HAMPDEN. June 1911.

NOTE

'The Everlasting Mercy' first appeared in *The English Review*for October 1911. I thank the Editor and Proprietors of that paper for permitting me to reprint it here. The persons and events described in the poem are entirely imaginary, and no reference is made or intended to any living person.

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